2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria



773
304

Then said the Matal, 'I have done this for you but you yourself must do more than this. First of all tattoo, then wash the place with cow-dung, then sprinkle haldi oil and offer rice in my name. Then holding the needles and some haldi and pulse in your right hand, catch hold of the first fingers of the woman you have tattooed in your left hand and with your right make three passes round her body. Put the haldi and pulse in her sari and let her go. By this means the burning of the marks will be cooled.'

At Palari in the Kondagaon Tahsil the Ojha gave a different version of their origin. Here they described how

Bara Deo was the son of Kadrengal and Tallur Muttai. He had six brothers and seven sisters. One day the seven sisters went to Tallur Muttai and asked her for ornaments such as would last even after death. Kadrengal gave Bara Deo a dhol and a dhamru drum. Then two sons were born to Bara Deo. One was called Murha and the other Ojha. Bara Deo taught Murha to beat the dhol with wooden sticks on the ground. Because he beat with wood on the ground Murha became a ploughman but Ojha played his dhamru slung from his shoulder, and spent his life hunting and drawing patterns on the walls of houses.

In this way the Ojha's wife learnt how to tattoo and once a year the Ojha gives a goat to Bara Deo saying, 'Behold, we go all over the world tattooing. From the marks we make let there be no wound, no pus, no swelling. Let no evil magic attack us as we work.' Because of this, Bara Deo lives with the Ojha and no witch can injure them at the time of tattooing.

304 The method of tattooing is still today very much what is supposed to have been taught the first Ojha woman by Budi Matal. Lamp-black, charcoal, 386 pounded incense is mixed with either castor, til or mahua oil. This is put in the broken half of an earthen pot, covered, and burnt over a lamp or a small fire. The black deposit is removed with a shell and kept in a small pot or bit of coconut.

304 The Ojha woman makes a pen of bamboo and draws the desired pattern on the skin. Then with three or four needles she pricks in the black colour. Before beginning she takes the names of the Seven Sisters of Bara Deo. At the end she receives from her victim's relatives rice, haldi, oil, chillies and salt. This she waves round the girl and sometimes performs the little rite with the needles that I have already described. She offers part of what she has received to the Seven Sisters. This helps the pricks to cool quickly and not hurt too much.

Muria girls are tattooed on the forehead, chin, arms and the calves of the legs. Most of the patterns are conventional—squares, triangles, and lozenges. Sometimes you may see two little figures representing a chelik and a motiari. There is no magical significance or even special meaning in the marks. 'It is for pleasure', say some Muria; others declare that it is simply a decoration, but a permanent one. 'Your words', a girl may whisper to her chelik, 'will remain like the tattoo marks on my breast.'[1]

[1] It is curious to find Crawley saying that it is 'erroneous' to attribute the painful processes of tattooing, boring and scarification to the desire for ornament. 'There is ample evidence that "savage mutilation" is never due to this desire; the savage does not hold with the maxim—*il faut souffrir pour être belle*.' This evidence is not given, but Crawley insists that tattooing and other mutilations are for the protection of the parts affected from supernatural dangers. I doubt if this is so in India.—E. Crawley, *The Mystic Rose* (London, 1927), Vol. II, pp. 168ff.